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84- 2173

MEMORANDUM

TO:

CIA LIAISON FOR DDI

25X1

FROM:

PETER SULLIVAN
MINORITY COUNSEL 

SUBJECT:

CASTRO/CUBAN RELATIONS WITH SOVIET UNION

DATE:

JUNE 18, 1984

Attached is an article by Roger Fontaine which appeared
in the June 15 Washington Times.

What is the latest and best intelligence on why Castro
didn't attend COMECON conference, Cuban relations with the
Soviet Union, amenability of Castro to diplomatic approaches
by the U.S.?

Attachment

ROGER FONTAINE

Fidel's Olympian pique

June 15, 1984

Fidel Castro did not attend the just-concluded Soviet bloc's economic summit in Moscow. All of his communist colleagues came. It was the first COMECON gathering in 13 years, one in which the Soviet Union's new leader, Konstantin Chernenko, had invested much of his personal prestige.

Not showing wasn't nice, and in the communist world protocol is especially sticky. So how come?

Stated crudely, the Maximum Leader of the Cuban revolution is mad as hell at the Russians.

The curious roller-coaster relationship, easily the most arabesque within the Soviet camp, dipped once more after the democratic liberation of Grenada last October, and it took another dip after Cuba withdrew from the Olympics last month.

The first jolt began when both the Soviet Union and Cuba decided to turn Grenada into their own private tiny satellite in the Eastern Caribbean.

Fidel Castro, because of his personal relationship with Maurice Bishop, and because of the island's proximity to Cuba, felt he had ownership rights.

The Soviets, a trifle short on revolutionary sentiment, thought otherwise. Grenada, they felt, was a strategically located airport, and its erratic leader, Maurice Bishop, was expendable. So like other heretodox Marxist leaders before him — Agostinho Neto of Angola, Hafizullah Amin of Afghanistan, and Salem Robaye Ali of South Yemen — Mr. Bishop was executed and replaced with much more trustworthy Soviet-style apparatchiki — Bernard Coard, a real Leninist if ever there was one, and Gen. Hudson Austin, Mr. Coard's hatchet man.

Mr. Castro took the turn of events that deposed his protege very badly. But his response was typical of a put-out inferior — which is to say petulant, but irrelevant.

Mr. Castro's retaliation consisted of refusing to celebrate last year's Nov. 10 anniversary of the Soviet revolution; refusing to invite any Soviets to the Cuban revolution's



Illustration by Shen Taylor/The Washington Times

25th birthday party this past Jan. 1; and refusing to mention the Soviets during his speech for that occasion.

Big deal.

After that Mr. Castro's pique became less visible, that is, until Moscow decided to quit the Los Angeles Olympics in retaliation for 1980 and a whole lot else.

Cuba's response was fascinating. Mr. Castro could have chosen to boycott the Soviet boycott of the Olympics, but did not. True, he did take two weeks to throw in the towel — far longer than it took the tamest of the tame East European poodles — but toss it in he did.

But how it must have pained Mr. Castro to do so. When asked why by the president of the Olympics organizing committee, Fidel could only mumble something about Socialist solidarity, thus undercutting his own media's campaign, which had been dutifully blasting the security

arrangements for Cuban athletes.

Although Moscow's pressure must have been awesome, and although the Cuban leader is as anxious as any good communist to make Ronald Reagan look bad, pulling out was clearly no fun for Fidel.

The reasons are several. First, the Maximum Leader has not forgotten Grenada.

Second, he knows that one of his few accomplishments has been improving the quality of Cuba's athletes. Cubans have always excelled in sports, but Mr. Castro provided the resources to make his country a major power in international athletics.

Third, by pulling out, he has further depressed an already demoralized, but sports-mad people. Although Mr. Castro seldom shows much sympathy for the suf-

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Roger Fontaine, a former member of the National Security Council staff, is a reporter for The Washington Times.

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ferings of his people (witness Mariel), even Caesars don't take away bread and circuses without some trepidation.

Fourth, Mr. Castro once more has isolated his country in the hemisphere by not appearing in Los Angeles. Everyone else in the Americas will be there. His claim to a Latin-American identity, an assertion he pushed hard and with some success after the Falklands war, has been undercut once again by kowtowing to the Soviets. Not even the Sandinistas, whose principal leaders, the Ortega brothers, were made to be Soviet bootlickers, have joined the no-show crowd.

"Cuba's response was fascinating. Mr. Castro could have chosen to boycott the Soviet boycott of the Olympics, but did not."

How that must hurt!

But most significantly, the decision runs against the inner character of Fidel Castro himself. As Carlos Montaner, a journalist who left Cuba in 1961, points out, Fidel is a "born competitor," "a man in permanent struggle with other men." He adds that "Castro, who plays baseball and basketball, and fishes under water, transmits to the nation his fiery competitive character."

And then Mr. Montaner hits us with the telling anecdote: "When he was a teen-ager at Belén Jesuit academy, he became famous among his schoolmates because in order to win a bet he tried to open an iron door by riding at it full speed with his bicycle. He cut his head, but the tears were shed because of the failure, not the pain."

Mr. Montaner concludes: "Transposing the Olympic motto, for Castro the question is to compete and win."

Olympic indeed. His iron-door-bashing are days over. So on a less Olympian note, that is why if Fidel can't go to Los Angeles, Fidel won't go to Moscow.